Gerard "Chip" Selby, his documentary "Reasonable Doubt" and, 1/4/91
hopefully, his promising start in his professional life

Chip has gotten a promising start in Hollywood working on a documentary based on the experiences of the Indian jailed over the Wounded Knee killings, Peltier. He had his wife Sandy, who is teaching school, made a hurried trip east, first since they were married after she graduated, ~~we~~ he was delayed getting here (she could not make it), and his visit was brief. I gather his future looks good and that it will, at least for the present, involve worthwhile projects.

His first-and only- TV documentary, Reasonable "Doubt" about the JFK assassination is, I think, the only good one yet made, and it is very good. It earned him the highest prize in the history category of the annual CINE competition, the letters representing as I now remember the Council on International non-Theatrical Events. It was his master's thesis, University of Maryland, School of Communications.

He brought me a pair of California T shirts, I think hand-painted. Nice!

It is not easy to recount what I know of his documentary and the great handicaps he faced in making it without seeming to take disproportionate credit for it so first I say, no ifs or buts, that it is his - entirely his. What made it possible is, I think, not common for young people, a willingness to listen to, think about and reach an independent judgement about the advice of older people. He did and I am certain that is what enabled him to conceive and complete a real fine product.

When Chip proposed the subject of his documentary his faculty advisers scoffed openly at the idea of any documentary on the JFK assassination. One consequence is that of the available equipment the oldest and poorest was what he was permitted to use. As one result the visual quality may not be as good as it would have been. Another result is that he had to refilm. He did me at least three times, each requiring a trip here. There were other such instances and when he was broke and in debt the costs to him were great. As I recall he was $40,000 in debt when he finished. He wore a car out in the required travels on which he was often forced to sleep in and work out of that car. Although by then we were good friends and after my cataract operation at Johns Hopkins he did drive me home about two years ago, he had so many miles on that car that after my open-heart surgery of a year ago I was relcuatant to accept his offer to drive me home with snow on the ground. To make his documentary he borrowed money wherever he could, he overused his charge card with the high interest on it, even borrowed money from his family and then gril friend, Sandy. He was working part-time for the Discovery TV channel and he offered his documentary to it first. It offered him only $10,000. When Arts and Entertainment channel offered him more and he asked Discovery to match that offer so he would not have to accept it, Discovery first refused that and then fired him for selling the rights to A & E. I do not recall how many times A & E aired it but I've been informed of many times.

This is, I am certain, an understatement of the many and difficult problems he had to face and surmount, in itself a tribute to him and a measure of the extraordinary difficulties that I think would have prevented most students and professionals from evolving the first-rate product he did produce.

When Chip first got started he was in touch with Dave Wrone, who told him he should speak to me. He did, he got my books and read them and he asked questions, none silly or in any way immature.

What to begin with impressed me most was his willingness to listen to and think about the first advice/caution I gave him, to avoid all conspiracy theories, to stick to the facts and to try to convert the tube into a courtroom, with the audience the jury. I told him that none of the conspiracy theories of which I knew were tenable and they had what I regard as a subversive effect, of deceiving and misleading the people while pretending to give a solution to the crime that continued to trouble the sorrowing people, particularly the young ones who were not then born or who were too young to recall what then was said. That he did ignore all those theories and did stick to the facts is what made the excellent documentary possible. There is no content flaw at all. And he did inform while not in any way disinforming or misleading. Of those who have seen it and have spoken to me about it, all expressed the highest opinion of it. I am talking about ordinary people who had no knowledge of the tragic event or its investigations, people ranging from janitors and retired janitors to those who were financially successful in their retirement, including some professionals.

I've asked him to make several appearances for me that I felt I should decline. He took the novel approach os showing his documentary instead of making a speech and then took questions. It worked very well.

When he told me he wanted to work on a King assassination documentary, which we both knew would require him to use my work, I told him that the completion of my started "The King Conspiracies" should come first, in part as backstopping for the documentary would could not begin to encompass all that I've developed, in part because it would enhance the prospects of the documentary and in part because the first appearance of the documentary might have an adverse effect on the book that should be done and that I am not in position to do now without assistance. He first said he'd be my helper on it but that, given his circumstances, was not practical. He then started working on it before he left for Hollywood. He returned last summer, after graduation, to marry Sandy. They then both went west.

I've forgotten the names of the company for which he is working and of its director, an Englishman of whom Chip has a high opinion. He has been talking on and off with a man named O'Connor about the King documentary and he says it looks like they will be able to proceed with it. He is working on the Indian project now. HW